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ABSTRACT

One of the major concerns in educating children with exceptional needs in the public school is the extent to which these children are socially accepted by teachers and peers. It has been suggested that the teacher may influence students' perceptions of handicapped children and that attempts to improve the social position of these children depend upon the teacher. An examination was made of perceptions of misbehavior of mildly mentally retarded children by special education and regular teachers. Forty-three regular teachers and nineteen special education teachers responded to a questionnaire asking them to indicate their degree of tolerance of 51 classroom behaviors identified as inappropriate. In addition, they were asked questions on their sense of personal responsibility for a student's behavior. Results of the study indicate that the special education teachers were more tolerant of inappropriate behaviors than were the regular class teachers, and were more likely to feel personally responsible for successfully coping with behavior problems. The reason for this may be that special education teachers feel more capable of influencing student outcomes because of specialized training. (JD)

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Toleration of Maladaptive Classroom Behaviors by Regular and Special Educators

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Introduction

One of the major concerns in educating children with exceptional needs in the public school is the extent to which these children are socially accepted by teachers and peers. This social acceptance is not only important for the exceptional child's self-esteem, but may affect the child's cognitive achievement. Often handicapped children in the regular classroom are less frequently selected as friends and are often rejected (Bruininks, 1978). While there has been an increased focus on "mainstreaming" handicapped students in regular classrooms, presumably to increase social acceptance, findings from several studies have failed to substantiate the assertions regarding the ability of regular class placement to enhance the social status of mildly handicapped students (Johnson, 1950; Goodman, Gottlieb, and Harrison, 1972). It has been suggested that the exposure of the mildly handicapped to their nonhandicapped peers permits handicapped children to exhibit academic incompetence and inappropriate behavior thereby causing them to be less accepted than segregated handicapped students by regular class peers (MacMillan and Morrison, 1980).

If mainstreaming efforts of handicapped students are to be successful in decreasing social rejection by nonhandicapped peers and teachers, then the factors which lead to social rejection must be identified. Social rejection may well result from exhibitions of inappropriate behaviors by the integrated handicapped student. Gottlieb, et al. (1978) state that there is little doubt that observable behavior in the presence of others affects social status. They go on to say that social rejection is related to the expression of negative behavior and not simply the absence of positive behavior.

Obviously, the teacher plays a major role regarding behavior in the classroom. Gottlieb, et al. (1978) investigated the relationship of social status measures and regular teacher and peer ratings of integrated educable mentally retarded (EMR) students on misbehavior and academic performance. They found

that regular teacher ratings of misbehavior of EMR students predicted more variance in social status even though social status scores were obtained from peer judgements. They also suggest that teachers may influence peers' perceptions of handicapped students and that attempts to improve the child's social position be directed toward the teacher rather than modifying interactions between students.

MacMillan and Morrison (1980) attempted to replicate Gottlieb et al. (1978) findings in self-contained special education educable mentally retarded (EMR) and educationally handicapped (EH) classrooms. They found that, unlike the regular teachers in Gottlieb et al. study, the special education teachers' behavior ratings of EMR and EH students did not account for significant amounts of variance of the social rejection measure. It appears that the correlates of social status of EMR and EH children in special classes differ from correlates in regular classes. While it is difficult to compare across these two samples, some interesting questions are raised as to the possible differences in behavioral expectations and standards between regular and special education teachers. Perhaps there are significant differences in perceptions of misbehavior between regular and special education teachers which can account for some of the unsuccessful attempts to integrate handicapped children.

The questions for this study were: were there differences between special education and regular teachers in degree of toleration of maladaptive behaviors; what specific behaviors are inappropriate in the classrooms of regular teachers as compared to special education teachers; and, what may be an underlying rationale for differences in level of toleration of behaviors.

Methods

Regular teachers (N=43) and special education teachers (N=19) of a large central California school district were asked to respond to a behavior questionnaire, the Inventory of Teacher Social Behavior Standards and Expectations

developed by Hill Walker of Oregon State University. The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their degree of toleration to 51 classroom behaviors identified as inappropriate. For example, one of the questions asks if a child refusing to share is unacceptable, tolerated or acceptable in the teachers classroom. Additionally, two exploratory questions from a Rand Corporation study (Berman et al., 1977) were asked in an attempt to ascertain preliminary data on teachers' sense of personal responsibility. The two questions were:

(external) When it comes down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.

(efficacy) If I really try hard, I can get through to the most difficult or unmotivated student.

Results

For this preliminary effort, the percentages of teachers marking the three responses (unacceptable, tolerated, acceptable) to the behaviors were calculated. The external and efficacy questions were answered on a six point agree-disagree continuum and a correlation coefficient calculated between the question and each behavior response. Table 1 presents the behaviors that were found to be more tolerable (more acceptable) by at least 15% more of the special education teachers and less tolerable by at least 15% more of the regular teachers. (No behaviors were found to be acceptable by more than three teachers.) The single behavior found to be more tolerated by regular teachers was "child is overly affectionate with other children and/or adults, e.g. touching, hugging, kissing.

As evident in Table 1, special education teachers were more tolerant than regular teachers on 19 of the 51 items of student inappropriate behaviors. Regular teachers were more tolerant than special education teachers on only one item.

Table 2 shows the simple correlation between the behaviors and the external and efficacy questions. Only correlations greater than .20 are shown. The negative correlations indicate that those who found the behaviors more acceptable

were more likely to agree with the external statement and/or the efficacy statement. The single positive correlation suggests that those teachers who agreed with the efficacy statement were unaccepting of a child demonstrating inappropriate behavior in class when corrected, e.g. shouts back, defies teacher, etc..

Discussion

The present study indicates that special education teachers are more tolerant of inappropriate behaviors than are regular class teachers. This finding lends support to MacMillan and Morrison's (1980) findings of different correlates of social status in special classes and regular classes. One must be cautious of using social status estimates or special education teacher behavioral judgements (relative to special class) as predictors of social status in a regular class. Gottlieb et al. (1978) suggest that since perceptions of misbehavior lead to social rejection, social status can most easily be improved by reducing rejection through modifying misbehaviors. This modifying of misbehavior must occur prior to placement in the regular class because once a child is integrated and perceived to manifest inappropriate behavior it is very difficult to change social status (Bryan, 1976).

The specific behaviors on which there were different ratings by special education and regular teachers have important implications. Special education teachers must know what specific behaviors lead to social rejection so that intervention can concentrate on modifying the most highly correlated behaviors. While the present study does not address this question specifically, McMichael (1980) found that destructive, irritating and aggressive behaviors lead to rejection among regular students, with aggression being cited as the primary reason for rejection of peers. Clearly, most of the behaviors listed in Table 1 fall into this category and suggest that special education teachers may be more

tolerant of those specific behaviors which lead to social rejection. It is also noted that the one behavior which regular teachers were more tolerant of was a child who is overly affectionate with other children and/or adults, e.g. touching, hugging, kissing--clearly not an aggressive behavior. Further investigation is needed to isolate which specific maladaptive behaviors lead to social rejection of handicapped students.

In attempting to look at underlying reasons for differences in toleration of inappropriate behaviors, the construct of teacher efficacy and its relationship to behavioral ratings was explored. It may be that special education teachers are more tolerant of inappropriate behaviors because they are more efficacious in terms of feeling more capable of influencing student outcomes because of specialized training. There were only slight differences found between special education and regular teachers on either the external or efficacy statements with special education teachers being less external and more efficacious. Berman et al. (1977) combined these two questions into a single measure of teacher efficacy which resulted in a powerful predictor of various outcome measures. This construct and its relationship to behavioral expectations must be further explored.

The negative correlations in Table 2 indicate that those teachers who agreed with both the external statement and/or the efficacy statement tended to be more accepting of the specific inappropriate behavior listed--would put up with the behavior temporarily, but prefer to see it reduced; while teachers who disagreed with the external and/or efficacy statement found the behaviors to be unacceptable--would not tolerate it in the classroom and would initiate active methods to eliminate it. It may be significant that a disproportionately high percentage of behaviors which were more acceptable by those teachers who agreed with these statements were non-aggressive behaviors as opposed to aggressive behaviors. Of the 51 inappropriate behavior items, only 27% would be considered

non-aggressive behaviors, while 50% of the behaviors in Table 2 are non-aggressive behaviors. Perhaps non-aggressive behaviors are more tolerated by most teachers because they are less disruptive to the classroom, and in turn may not significantly affect social status.

TABLE 1

Behaviors Seen as More Tolerable to
Special Education Teachers

Child tests or challenges teacher imposed limits, e.g. classroom rules.

Child has tantrums.

Child babbles to her/himself.

Child engages in stereotyped repetitive, e.g. repeats the same response over and over in the same way such as pencil tapping, drumming fingers or playing with objects.

Child refuses to share.

Child engages in silly, attention getting behavior, e.g. makes unusual noises/ gestures, imitates cartoon characters, etc.

Child cheats, e.g. copies work from others.

Child talks out of turn.

Child asks irrelevant questions, e.g. questions serve no functional purpose and are not task related.

Child does not follow specified rules of games and/or class activities.

Child refuses to play in games with other children.

Child forces the submission of peers by being dominant, bossy and/or overbearing.

Child starts activities but does not finish them.

Child argues and must have the last word in verbal exchanges with peers and/or teacher.

Child displays high levels of dependence, e.g. needs excessive amounts of assistance, feedback, and/or supervision to complete simple tasks.

Child is inexcusably late for the beginning of class activities.

Child does not share toys and equipment in a play situation.

Child does not follow and/or give into necessary rules of games and class activities.

Child reacts negatively to assigned school work, e.g. complains, sulks, refuses to start task.

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Behavior
and Efficacy Question

Behaviors	External	Efficacious
Child tests or challenges teacher imposed limits, e.g. classroom rules.	-.22	
Child has tantrums.	-.27	
Child uses obscene language.	-.22	
Child pouts or sulks.	-.26	
Child does not follow specified rules of games and/or class activities.		-.24
Child refuses to play in games with other children.	-.26	
Child behaves inappropriately in class when corrected, e.g. shouts back, defies the teacher, etc.		-.26
Child forces the submission of peers by being dominant, bossy and/or overbearing.		-.27
Child displays high levels of dependence, e.g. needs excessive amounts of assistance, feedback, and/or supervision to complete simple tasks.	-.27	-.30
Child is overly affectionate with other children and/or adults, e.g. touching, hugging, kissing.	-.27	
Child is excessively demanding, e.g., demands too much individual attention.	-.23	
Child is seriously withdrawn, e.g. whenever possible avoids social contact with other children and/or adults.	.32	-.21

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